

The End of the North Carolina Navy

-1-

The Naval Historical Foundation is a branch of work in the Navy Department at Washington, having for its object collecting material bearing on "The Vanishing History and Traditions of the Naval Service." When first organized its purpose was to institute researches in Massachusetts, Virginia and North Carolina for private letters, and unpublished reports, throwing light on interesting incidents of the Naval service. However, the funds were exhausted before North Carolina was reached. Capt. ^{ain} Knox, U. S. N. whose address is Navy Dept. Washington, would be glad to have access to any such material and there may be some preserved at each of our seaports. Through the courtesy of Capt. Knox, I am able to present an account of one of the incidents in the Naval battle at Elizabeth City on April 1862- the destruction of the Sea Bird, the Confederate Flag Ship. It is contained in a letter written by Lieut. Flusser to his mother. Lieut. Flusser was a genial, kindly gentleman, as indicated by this preliminary paragraph. "I went out the other day with a flag of truce and had a pleasant interview with a Lieut Colonel Towner of the 62nd Georgia. I bantered him pleasantly, and he me. I carried out to him some good whiskey and tolerable cigars. I told him I knew he had had nothing of the sort for a long time. From the way he took to them I think my surmise was correct. He laughed at the idea of our starving the Rebs into submission. There will certainly be a famine in this state no one left here to cultivate the crops. Provisions are scarce and very dear. Alas for the poor!"

The Confederate fleet of five little steamers had exhausted its ammunition and fuel in the battles around Roanoke Island and Commodore Wm. T. Lynch brought it up to Elizabeth City for supplies.. Having obtained enough for two vessels only he started with them to return to Roanoke Island, but at the mouth of the river learned that the Island had surrendered-and the Federal Fleet was coming! Returning, he distributed the ammunition among his five vessels, and formed a line of battle across the river just above where a land battery

2

had been erected. Going to the battery he found in it only seven militia
men, under a civilian. Determining to defend it himself, he had Lieut. Parker
of the Beaufort, to bring on shore his ammunition, officers and crew, leaving
only sufficient of the latter to take that vessel up to the canal. We at
first manned three of the guns with the aid of the militiamen, but they speed-
ily deserted, and we fought with only two 32 pounders. The enemy advanced
very boldly, and contrary to my expectation, instead of taking position as he
did at Roanoke Island for the purpose of Shelling out the battery, he contin-
ued to press on; in one hour and five minutes succeeded in passing it, and,
with full complement of men, closed upon our half-manned gun-boats.

"The commanders of the latter were instructed, when their ammunition failed
to escape with their vessels if they could; if not, to run into shoal water,
destroy the signal books, set fire to the vessels and save their crews.

The little steamers being at their stations, Capt. J. W. Cooke, who com-
manded the Ellis says " In consequence of the width of the river the enemy
was able to run down on us, every one of their vessels being superior to any
of ours, and of heavier ~~militia~~ metal.

Two of them ~~surrounded~~ surrounded the Ellis.

In an account written by Capt. Moffitt it is said: Boarders swarmed on
board the Ellis and were met, cutlas in hand, by the dauntless Captain, who, al-
though badly wounded by a musket ball and by a thrust from a bayonet, fought
with the fierceness of a tiger, refusing to surrender or to haul down his
flag". But seeing that further resistance was useless, Cooke, ordered the men
to save themselves, if possible, the vessel being near the shore. Most of the
men took to the water and escaped, says Moffitt. Overpowered by numbers Cooke
was borne to the deck, and would have been slaughtered on the spot, but for the
generous interference of an old associate, who caused him to be safely conveyed
to Commodore Rervan's flag ship, where extreme kindness was extended.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/endofnorthcaroli00ashe>

While this was in progress on the Ellis, the fight on the Sea Bird was in full swing. Lieut. Flusser wrote to his mother: "We met the enemy on the 10th instant, a short distance below Elizabeth, and protected by a four-gun battery. They had five steamers; we had nine, but only two or three of ours got up in time to fight the rebel steamers.

I was given the lead. I singled out the largest vessel, Commodore Lynch's flagship, the Sea Bird, and ordered my pilot to run her down.

When about two hundred yards from her, and after passing through the fire of the battery and giving them some good shots in return, I fired a nine-inch shell at her, which struck her just amidships, at the water line, passing through her as if she was so much paper, and exploded a great distance beyond. I then called away boarders and ran for her, my men picking up their muskets, pistols and cutlasses for a hand to hand fight. When fifty yards or more from her she hauled down her flag and her commander appeared on the upper deck holding open his coat to signify that he had surrendered. I immediately ordered the helm put a port and the steamer stopped to avoid striking him, but my men were so crazy with excitement and made so much noise that the helmsman could not hear, and so plumb into her we went, smashing in her whole port bow. My men immediately jumped on board and I had to follow to restrain them from injuring the prisoners. The captain surrendered to my vessel, stated that he was in a sinking condition, and asked me to rescue his officers and men. I was anxious to secure another steamer and gave the order to back out, and pursue when, to my inexpressible annoyance, I found that as we struck the Sea Bird the fastenings of our anchor went and the anchor had gone to the bottom, so we were anchored and I could not move. The men were frantic with excitement and for ten minutes I could not get any one to slip the chain, then one of the engineers unshackled it. I cut the line which fastened us to our prize with my sword, and was just leaving when her captain ^{spoke} to me for the second or third time and

100

100

begged me, for God's sake, not to leave his men to drown, so to save them I reluctantly gave up the pursuit. While I was at anchor engaged taking the prisoners from the sinking vessel two small rebel steamers ran around us, firing with musketry at my men. I could have sunk them both with one gun each, but my men were so wild that I could not get them to their quarters at the great guns. One of these steamers came up on my starboard quarter only ten or fifteen yards off, where there was not a man but myself, and tried to train a great gun on us. I repeatedly called the men to their guns, but they would not come, so as a last chance, for I felt that if the gun was fired I was destroyed, I drew my revolver, a small-sized Colt's, and fired at the captain of the enemy's gun. I fired three or four shots with deliberate aim and saw the captain of the gun and the man on his left fall; whether I hit them or not I do not know, I only know that the gun was not fired.

The Sea Bird was sunk, the Ellis was ^{overpowered and captured} and the Fanny and the Forest were burnt, by their officers; the crews escaping to the shore. The Appemattox alone escaping up the river. It was the end of the North Carolina Navy.

S. D. Colby

[The text in this section is extremely faint and illegible. It appears to be a list or a series of entries, possibly containing names and dates, but the characters are too light to transcribe accurately.]